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SUBJECT: ARCHANGELSK DOCTOR'S ATTEMPT TO HEAL HEALTH CARE PROBLEMS

¶11. (SBU) Around 300 people assembled in the central square of Archangelsk on May 29 to protest inadequate funding and equipment shortages in local hospitals and the lack of transparency in budget spending. The organizers of the protest were primarily surgeons from various regional hospitals. Archangelsk Mayor Viktor Pavlenko and Chairman of the Region's Health Committee Andrey Krasilnikov attended the rally and declared that the situation would be resolved shortly. Their assurances failed to assure the protestors, however, who insisted on a meeting between the doctors and local authorities on June 19 to discuss any progress made in fulfilling the protestors' demands.

¶12. (SBU) These protests stem from doctors' claims that the situation in many hospitals is becoming desperate due to a lack of equipment which has left them unable to provide emergency care for their patients. Hospitals have been understaffed for years and employees frequently quit because of low salaries, leaving the remaining doctors to work even longer hours. Doctors say that their problems are caused by a budgetary policy which lacks transparency and the general indifference of local officials to the healthcare industry's troubles.

¶13. (SBU) Local authorities initially refused to allow the protest but eventually relented. Pavlenko's and Krasilnikov's participation was interpreted by leaders of the protest as an effort by the government to remain in control of the situation, or at least appear to be in control. As evidence of the government's overall consternation with the situation, the organizers cited a television program about Archangelsk's healthcare system that was scheduled to be shown on one of the federal networks but was later cancelled. Some participants in the protest have since claimed that they have been threatened with termination if they continue with their protests. The problems which initially sparked the protest have not been resolved. While one of the protest leaders admits that limited steps have been taken to resolve the underlying problems, he also states the local authorities have reneged on their promises to follow through on other measures. It is not clear whether the promised meeting between protesting doctors and local authorities will actually take place on June 19.

GWALTNEY